

# Georgia

## The Ancient People of Trans-Caucasia

By Henry W. Nevinson

Author of "The Dawn in Russia"

IT is difficult to define the exact limits of Georgia, for since the treacherous invasion of the country by Soviet Russians, Armenians, and Turks in the March of 1921, the independence of the Georgians has been again overthrown and their territory absorbed within the nominal boundaries of Russia.

Before the Great War the Province of Georgia, or Trans-Caucasia, included all the vast valley lying between the range of the Caucasus (which runs for about 900 miles from the Black Sea to the Caspian) and the range of Anti-Caucasus, which culminates in Mount Ararat. Its capital was Tiflis, its ports Batum and Poti on the Black Sea, and Baku on the Caspian; its connexion with Persia and Armenian or Kurdish Turkey ran through the southern town of Erivan, and near to Erivan stood the town and monastery of Etchmiadzin, the centre of the Armenian Church.

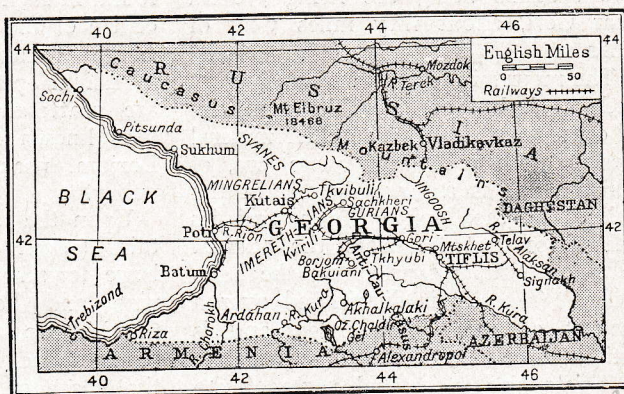
In former times the frontiers of the Georgian kingdom extended even beyond these limits, but the delegates of the Democratic Republic (established in May, 1918, and confirmed by the Constituent Assembly in March, 1919) claimed a much reduced territory from the Supreme Council in Paris, which gave the Georgian Republic "de facto recognition" in January, 1920, and "de jure recognition" in January, 1921.

We will keep to the frontiers then laid down, excluding the so-called Republics of Azerbaijan, with its capital at Baku, and of Armenia, with its capital at Erivan. Georgia proper will then be included within a line drawn from a point on the Black Sea, just

south of Tuapse, along the central summits of the Caucasus, over the two giant peaks of Elbruz and Kazbek (both over 18,000 feet), to a point about half-way down the mountain barrier of Daghestan, the home of the Moslem Lesghians.

The line then turns sharply south till it reaches the junction of the fertile Alaksan valley with the river Kura on its way from Tiflis to the Araxes and Caspian Sea. Then it follows the right or south bank of the Kura westward, and leaving the Kura below Tiflis, it runs almost due west across the Tiflis-Erivan railway, excludes Alexandropol, the junction for Kars, but includes Akhalkalaki and Ardahan, and so reaches the coast of the Black Sea just west of Riza, and about thirty miles east of Trebizond.

Within those frontiers is included a population of some three and a half or four million people, nearly ninety per cent. of whom are of pure Georgian stock. Their country is of singular beauty, fertility, and richness in minerals. The temperature ranges from perpetual snow down to sub-tropical heat. The land is always well watered by streams from both mountain ranges. The Rion



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#### GEORGIAN HOUSEWIFE AT HER DAILY TASK

The Georgian love of finery can be seen in the gay materials from which this housewife's garments are made. Kneeling by her oven, she is engaged in baking thin, pancake-like chupatties of flour and water. The oven is merely a hole in the ground, in the centre of which is a wood fire; this supplies heat to the sloping sides, against which the bread is baked

*Photo, Major W. J. P. Rodd*

(ancient Phasis) with its tributaries draining into the Black Sea, and the Kura with its tributaries draining into the Caspian, form the chief river systems, the watershed between the two systems being the rising ground near Gori, about fifty miles west of Tiflis.

The mountain formations supply very little coal, but considerable quantities of copper and iron. The chief mineral wealth consists in manganese ore, of which there is a large deposit in the valleys of the Kvirili River and its tributaries, not far from the ancient town of Kutais, overlooking the Rion valley. The ore is distributed over a district of 400 square miles, and is estimated at 200,000,000 tons available. It exists also in several parts of the country. Oil has been occasionally

tapped within the limits of Georgia proper, and I have seen prospectors at work for it at the head of the Alaksan valley, and in the neighbourhood of Batum. But hitherto it has not been found in such quantities as at the great centre of the oil district around Baku. Large numbers of "mineral" or medicinal springs, both hot and cold, are scattered over the country, the best known being in the district of Borjom, near the top of the Kura valley.

Upon the lower slopes of the mountains (about 3,000 to 4,000 feet) are large forests of oak, beech, chestnut, pine and boxwood. Rhododendrons flourish up to nearly 10,000 feet. Oranges and lemons grow freely along the coast of the Black Sea. Under cultivation there is great abundance of



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maize, the principal food of the peasants. Barley, wheat, cotton, rice, and tea are also grown, and before the war there was an increasing trade in Georgian tobacco, usually exported as Turkish. There was also considerable trade in silk, fruit, cheese, timber, liquorice, wool, and skins. But one of the chief products was wine.

In the Alaksan valley at vintage the whole country seems to run with wine.

The grapes are squeezed in primitive presses, cleaned with boughs of yew, and the juice run off into huge earthenware vats sunk in the ground, and big enough to hold a man, for when fermentation is finished and the wine drawn off a man gets into the vat to clean it out. The wine is usually poured into tarred buffalo skins, which are laid upon narrow wooden carts and driven slowly along the mountain roads,



### WHERE WOMEN WORK AND MEN ARE IDLE

The numerous races that inhabit Georgia share the laziness that is characteristic of the Oriental, many men spending their days in idleness, while their womenfolk do the work of house and field. Content to sit and meditate in their picturesque rags, these Georgians sometimes do not stir from their home all day, except, perhaps, for a short walk in the cool of the evening

*Photo, Major W. J. P. Rodd*



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joggling as they go. In 1913 Georgia produced 32,000,000 gallons of wine, about a third of which was exported to Russia. But much was also sent to France to serve as "body" for "Burgundy" and "Bordeaux."

Before 1900 three-quarters of the export and import trade was done with England, but after that date until the war Germany rapidly forged ahead, so that in 1913 she held 65 per cent., and the British trade had dropped to 7 per cent., though the greater part of the shipping entering Batum was still



**VETERAN OF A MOUNTAIN STATE**

Despite a brief spell of independence, his country is still under alien control, but with heart nothing daunted he continues to cherish the hope that Georgia will one day free herself from the tyrannous Russian yoke

*Photo, Mrs. W. G. Wilson*



**WOMAN OF A HANDSOME RACE**

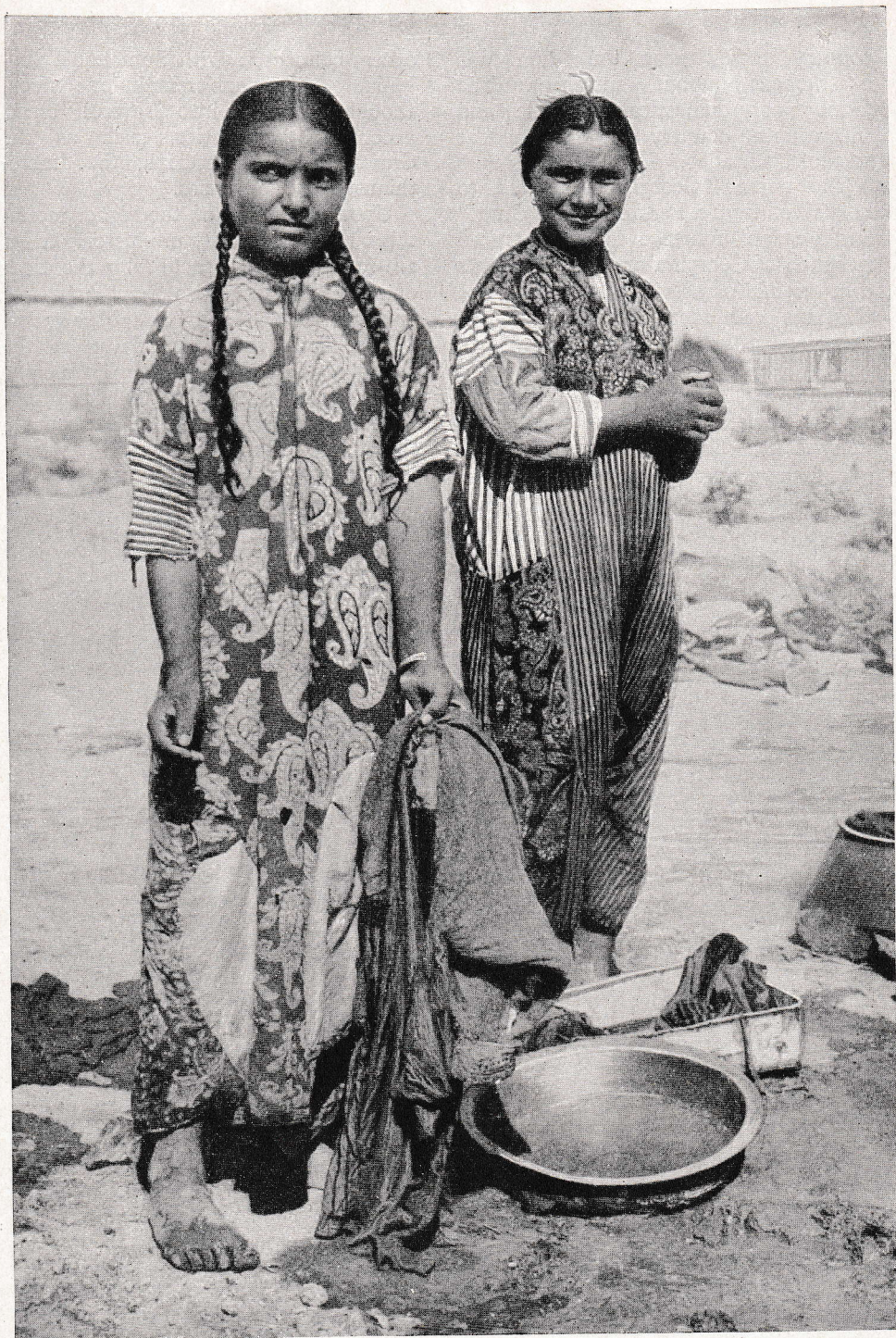
One of a hardy, liberty-loving people, this gaily-clad Georgian shares the national hatred of meanness, and is ever hospitality itself, believing in the proverbial saying: "A guest—a man from God"

*Photo, Major W. J. P. Rodd*

British, the German and other goods being chiefly carried in British bottoms. For passengers from Europe (Marseilles) France ran the best line of steamers.

In the high mountains a beautiful ibex (tur) may still be found, and the wild bison occurs. Bears are frequent, living chiefly upon the wild grape, varied with an occasional kid. Wild boar, reindeer, and antelopes exist in the forests, and along the banks of the Phasis (Rion), from which they take their name, are large quantities of pheasants, always marked, I think, with the white ring round the neck, as seen in recent English breeds. Before the war the price of a pheasant in the





**"THINGS OF RAGS AND PATCHES": AFTER THEIR MORNING TUB**

These black-haired, smiling Georgian girls, in their gowns of brightly-coloured Manchester cotton, and with their "shining morning faces," have just returned from their morning bath in the river, and are now busy washing their clothes. Though patched and torn, their simple dresses are gaily patterned and picturesque, forming bright spots of colour in a drab landscape

*Photo, Major W. J. P. Rodd*



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country towns near the Rion was 25 kopeks (about sixpence). The number of domesticated cattle and sheep in the country was estimated at 12,000,000 head.

The name "Georgian" is said to be derived from a Persian word "Gurg," and Persian influence is easily traced in much of Georgian art. The people's own original name was Khartli, but the Russians call them Groussians. All Georgians still speak the same language, which, I believe, has not hitherto been traced to any other relationship, though some scholars, such as Rawlinson, Lenormant, Michel Tzarethcli, and

others connect it with Sumerian-Babylonian. Georgians remain one stock, though divided into several clans, according to district, such as the Gurians, the Mingrelians, the Imere-thians, and the Svanes.

Upon the slopes of the higher mountains relics of almost pre-historic tribes are found, like strata left by the tides of successive invasions from Asia, and driven up to the least habitable regions.

Here and there, especially in the parts of Georgia east of Tiflis, one comes upon colonies of Molokans, the Russian Quaker sect, so called because they drink milk in Lent; and one finds



### DESCENDANTS OF THE GOLDEN HORDE EN FÊTE

These small Tartar children have donned their best clothes in honour of a national holiday. Bright colours are dear to the heart of the people of the Caucasus, and the scarlet velvet caps of this quintet of girls are gaily decorated with gold braid or beads. The name Golden Horde was given to a branch of the Kiptchak Tartars who invaded Europe in the thirteenth century

*Photo, Florence Farmborough*





#### MUSICAL INTERLUDE IN A GEORGIAN GLADE

Seated on the pile of timber he has been cutting, this Georgian peasant snatches a few minutes' rest from his labour, and whiles away the time with a tune on his bagpipe. One of the most ancient forms of musical instrument, the bagpipe is in great favour among the people of the Caucasus, few of whom lack musical ability

also colonies of Germans who migrated from Swabia early in the nineteenth century because they were told the end of the world was at hand, and it would be well to be in Jerusalem when the time came. They moved slowly, and as nothing catastrophic occurred, and the agents whom they sent forward reported ill of life in the Holy City, they remained upon lands allotted them, and constructed typical German villages, cultivated their fields in the German manner, and still retained their German tongue and literature, though they speak Russian, and sometimes Georgian as well. At one time there were large settlements also of the Russian sect of Doukhobors, or Spirit-wrestlers, but

owing to the persecution under Nicholas II., nearly all of them were emigrated to Canada at the end of the nineteenth century. In the mountains dwell tribes called the Ingoosh, especially along the route of the old Georgian military road—improved by the Russian Government in 1865—from Vladikavkas (Fortress of the Caucasus) to the ancient Georgian capital of Mtskheta, only a short distance west of Tiflis. These Ingoosh tribes are reported to live by brigandage, but I came through them undisturbed in 1906, though the military road was at that time declared closed and unprotected owing to revolution.

The Georgians proper are a finely-formed and remarkably intelligent





#### REPLENISHING THE CELLARS OF A GEORGIAN TAVERN

These men are just delivering at a village tavern a consignment of wine from the vineyards of Kakhetia, whence comes some of Georgia's choicest vintage. Wine is the common drink of all classes, and at vintage-time the country is running with it. The wine is usually stored in tarred buffalo-skins, three legs of which are sewn up, the fourth, which is tied, serving as a spout

*Photo, Mrs. W. G. Wilson*

people. They have a passion for education, and before the Bolshevik invasion of 1921 possessed in almost every village libraries of Georgian and other literature, which the Russian invaders at once destroyed. At Tiflis they had a great college or university, built by the Georgian Princes, or land-owners; for when the Russian Tsars annexed the country, contrary to their formal treaty early in the nineteenth century, they granted the title of Kneaz, or Prince, to the chief land-owners, and it usually happened that a Prince owned about thirty acres.

Owing to the difficulty of the language and script, little is known of Georgian literature outside the country, though some German scholars have studied it; and Marjory Wardrop, sister to Oliver Wardrop—himself a Georgian scholar and British High Commissioner in

Trans-Caucasia, 1919-1920—translated "The Hermit," a poem written on an ancient Kazbek shrine by Prince Ilia Chavchavadze (born 1837). The most famous Georgian classic is "The Man in the Panther's Skin" (Vepkhvis Tkaosani), written during the reign of the great Queen Tamara, about the time of the English Richard I. Towards the end of the seventeenth century Prince Sul Khan, one of the great Orbeliani family, said to have originated from China, wrote an excellent account of a "Journey through Europe" in Georgian, collected the Georgian folklore—he was personally acquainted with La Fontaine—and compiled a Georgian dictionary of 25,000 words.

Church architecture is mainly traditional, the type being best represented by the ancient monastery of Gelati, in the mountains above Kutais. It was





#### FETCHING THE DAY'S WATER SUPPLY FROM A CAUCASIAN RIVER

Though water is laid on in a more or less civilized manner in the larger towns, elsewhere in Georgia the methods of supply are still very elementary. This well designed bridge, strongly built in order to resist recurring floods, witnesses daily the filling up and removing of barrels of water which are drawn by bullocks or, sometimes, by mountain ponies

*Photo, Mrs. W. G. Wilson*



#### PLOUGHING IN THE PASSES OF THE CAUCASUS

This handsome Georgian boy is ploughing near the great military road over the Caucasus Mountains. The oxen on whose yoke he is sitting are only two in a team of a dozen which two boy companions help him to control. Some of these ploughs require ten pairs of oxen to draw, and seven men to guide them—a great expenditure of energy with but poor result

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*





#### STALWART DESCENDANT OF A HARDY MOUNTAIN RACE

With his faithful companion at his feet, this young Georgian stands outside his wooden dwelling. The large, sleeveless cloak, known as a *bourka*, that he wears flung over the left shoulder, is of thick black felt made from goat or horse hair, and serves not only as a useful waterproof for rainy days, but also as a warm blanket when the nights are cold

Photo, Mrs. W. G. Wilson





#### MEMBER OF THE GEORGIAN ARISTOCRACY

Until comparatively recent times, the feudal system existed in Georgia, and the peasant classes were ruled by petty princes. Blue blood still runs in the veins of many landowners, and this prince is representative of the aristocracy of his country. The goat's-hair cloak and astrakhan cap that he wears are characteristic of the Georgian, who is never without his dagger, except when in European clothes



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built, probably upon an older foundation, in the latter part of the eleventh century, at the time of David the Restorer. The cone-shaped tops to the towers are distinctively Georgian, and though the Byzantine influence is evident, a Georgian church can always be recognized by its resemblance to traditional type. The sacred painting is traditional also, but it is hardly to be distinguished from Byzantine. The famous Iberian Virgin, now at Mount Athos, was a Georgian work—said to be of the seventh century—but the copy of it under one of the Kremlin gates in Moscow is so Byzantine in character that Russian worshippers regard it only as the most sacred of their icons.

In point of doctrine there is no real difference between the Orthodox Russian or Greek Church and the Georgian; but the Georgians claim ecclesiastic independence, with control of their own church property, and their Church suffered much persecution and pillage

at the hands of the Russian Government up to the Russian revolution. And it suffered under Bolshevik domination, though for different reasons.

Georgian houses are built of rough stone or baked mud, and usually provided with large wooden balconies round the first floor. The roofs are generally red tile, of the wavy shape common throughout the Near East. Often the houses in the richer districts, as in the Alaksan valley, are of great beauty, and sometimes traces of Persian occupation are seen in relics of harem screens before windows, and in brilliant glazed tiles built into the walls. Besides architecture and sacred icons there is little native art, except the work in silver and steel.

Fine daggers and swords of tempered steel, with sheaths of chased silver, were made in Vladikavkaz up to the Great War, and the daggers were part of the equipment of Caucasian soldiers, as well as of ordinary peasants. A very



YOUNG SONS OF GEORGIA'S MOUNTAIN PEASANTRY

Wearing the astrakhan caps that are the Georgian national headdress, these lads are sitting by the great military road which traverses the largest pass through the chain of the Caucasus. Kazbek, near by, is one of several villages to be found in the wider parts of the pass of Dariel, and takes its name from that of a great family that once owned the countryside

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*





#### YOUTH, MANHOOD, AND OLD AGE OF THE GEORGIAN RANK AND FILE

More than 2000 years ago the Georgians were a free people. Conquered by Alexander the Great, they again became independent on his death in 323 B.C., and their kingdom attained the zenith of its prosperity about 1200. After the annexation to Russia in 1801 the national spirit of enterprise virtually disappeared from Georgia, but the people, though still hard pressed by foreign rule, are gradually working their way towards light and liberty

*Photo, Major W. J. P. Rodd*

beautiful kind of silver belt or girdle was also made, and was worn by many Georgian women. But perhaps the very best metal work was done by the Moslem Lesghians of Daghestan and the mountains no longer included in Georgia.

The Georgian men usually wear an astrakhan cap called Papakh, and in winter a huge, sleeveless cloak of shaggy wool, called Bourka. When it is not very cold they wear a long coat or jacket (Tcherkeska) of rough

wool, and underneath a linen or cotton tunic, loose trousers and leggings. The chest before the Great War was usually adorned with copious rows of cartridges, and a dagger was hung at the girdle. The women wear a similar Tcherkeska, skirts, and silver chains and buckles across the bodice. Their most peculiar article of dress is a stiff band of velvet round the head, holding in place a large white veil, two long false curls being attached to the velvet band. This adornment is a recognized object



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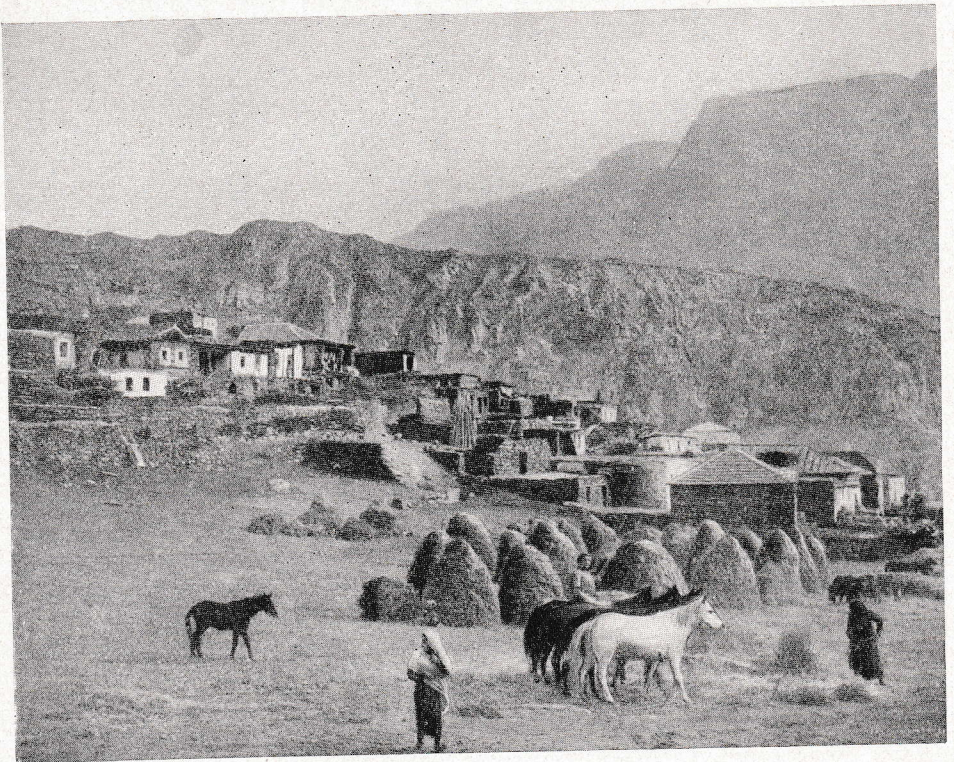
of sale in most Georgian shops or general stores.

At marriages large white veils, often of fine lace, are hung over the head, false curls and all. Widows and the mothers of babies who have died wear white veils without any ornament. At weddings, usually held just after the vintage, the bride's cart or phaeton is preceded by a cavalcade of her male relations, who ride desperately to and fro, galloping their horses up and down the steepest ravines, perhaps a faint reminder of the ancient marriage by capture. They represent the defending force. In front of the cart walks a "merryman," holding a long skewer in either hand, with bits of bread on one skewer and fragments of cooked meat on the other. At his side is a friend with a dripping wine-skin, and every passer-by receives a bit of bread

and meat and a sup of wine in honour of the bride.

Then come the musicians with the bagpipes (Zurna), mandoline, and drum. The music is of that quavering, nasal, and minor kind common throughout the Near and Middle East, and usual even in India. Probably it is Persian in origin. It continues, with dancing, outside the church during the ceremony, and then the procession conducts the bride and bridegroom to their house, where the husband lifts the wife over the threshold in accordance with tradition common in other countries as well as in ancient Rome.

Near Signakh, a mountain town, overlooking the Alaksan valley in the district of Kakhetia, stands an ancient convent covering part of the holy Nina's remains (the Saint who first brought Christianity to the Caucasus, probably in the fourth



### WRESTING A MEAGRE HAY CROP FROM A RUGGED SOIL

The inhabitants of this little Caucasian village of Gergeti, which is half-way up the Kazbek, called by the Georgians Ice Mountain, eke out a precarious living from their toil in the fields. Their flat-topped houses, like those of many of these mountain communities, are built so that the roof of one forms a front yard for the house above

*Photo, Maynard Owen Williams*





#### EASE AND LUXURY IN THE CAUCASUS

Surrounded by brightly-coloured rugs and hangings of rich Caucasian silks, this dark-eyed daughter of the mountains reclines at ease on her cushioned divan. A cultured woman of European education, she yet clings to the costume of her people, comprising a silken coat which covers loose trousers gracefully caught in at the ankles, and a scarlet velvet cap, richly ornamented with pearls

*Photo, Florence Farmborough*

century). The rest of her relics are now in a village church in Belgium, but I do not know how they came there. It is a place of peculiar veneration, but hardly less frequented is the white church of Allaverdi in the valley below. For about vintage-time a kind of Feast of Reason is held there, and all sects or religions and enemies of every kind may meet as under a Truce of God and drink wine together.

The word Allaverdi is said to mean God the Giver, and probably refers to the divine bounty of harvest and vintage, but Oliver Wardrop traced it to the memory of great assistance given by Tartars to the Georgians in one of their many wars against the Persian invaders. At all events the word has now passed into the Georgian language, and is the cheerful cry when at banquets they call upon the stranger to empty a goblet at one draught. For the country,

as I have said, overflows with wine, though to be sure the more temperate sometimes drink the fermented mare's milk called Koumiss.

It must not be supposed, however, that life in the Caucasus, even before the Bolshevik invasion, was all milk and honey and wine. In the higher mountains life was wretchedly poor, the cattle and sheep and a little maize or rye bread being the only food. In the mountain inns or rest houses I have often found nothing at all to eat or drink, and have slept upon slightly slanted shelves of board with six or eight men lying in a row beside me—no covering or warmth of any kind.

The Georgians, especially in the region of Guria, which lies westward towards the Black Sea, are peculiarly capable of self-government. This was proved during the brief period of freedom from Russian rule (1904-1906),





#### RIDERS OF THE PLAINS AND HUNTERS OF THE HILLS: A HALT ON THE ROAD

Renowned throughout the world for their wonderful horsemanship, the Circassians well deserve their fame. It is said that they can ride before they can walk, and certainly the management of horses appears to be an instinct with the young Circassian, who is, indeed, bred to the saddle from his earliest years. These riders can perform many marvellous feats in the saddle, such as mounting a racing horse and standing erect at full gallop, and the Circassian's horse, being singularly surefooted, is especially bred for its ability to traverse the perilous paths of the Caucasus

*Photo, Florence Farmborough*



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when the Russian Government was too much occupied with the disastrous war with Japan, and Georgia declared her independence. The Gurian peasants live in isolated farms, but they combined into communes, elected their own councils, boycotted all Russian authorities, organized all their public works, and summoned transgressors before public meetings of the commune, where guilt was decided by vote, and the punishment (usually in the form of boycott) was duly allotted. It was of this experiment that Tolstoy wrote to a friend in the country:

What is happening in Guria is an event of immense importance. Tell the Gurians there is an old man who for twenty years has been ceaselessly repeating that all the evils of humanity are due to the fact that men are always expecting to find some external aid with which to organize their lives, and when they see that the authorities do not aid them,



### BRED TO ARMS FROM INFANCY

This small Circassian lad is a miniature replica of his father, his white parade uniform being complete in every detail, with tiny dagger, cartridge-cases, and fittings and trimmings of Caucasian silver

*Photo, Florence Farmborough*



### THE GARB OF HIS ANCESTORS

The chief feature of this ceremonial costume, the "kuladja," which is now only seen at public festivals in Georgia, is the gold or silver dagger, which gives an added touch of richness to the crimson velvet jacket

*Photo, N. M. Kirtashvili*

and do not create order, they begin to accuse them, to condemn them, to revolt against them. What should be done is exactly what the Gurians are doing—to organize life in such a manner that there should be no need for any authority.

Such being the character of the people, it is all the more lamentable that after their brief periods of freedom (in 1904-1906 and 1918-1921) they should again have fallen under the oppressive domination of the Russian hordes and the peculiarly arbitrary and centralised form of Soviet government.





GROUP OF GERMAN PEASANT WOMEN ADORNED WITH THE MANIFOLD FALLS OF BLACK FOREST FASHION  
 The German Black Forest has a two-fold attraction, its picturesque scenery and its picturesque peasantry. Scarcely a valley but has its own peculiar charm of landscape, and scarcely a village but has its own variety of peasant dress. A native of the Black Forest may be easily recognized by his costume, and there are certain districts where the distinctive head-dress seen above, composed of a high coronet of beads, is worn by every village girl

*Photo, Underwood Press Service*